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THE

NATIONAL FAST

OF 1832.

A HELP FOR DULY OBSERVING IT.

BY

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NATIONAL FAST.

GOD, our Heavenly Father, has disposed our Gracious King to appoint Wednesday, March 21st, as a day for national humiliation and fasting. This day may either greatly increase the Divine displeasure at our sins, by an unsuitable and unbecoming conduct, or, if duly observed, it may turn that displeasure away from us. The following pages have been written to help in its due observance.

The immediate cause of this fast, and the manner in which it should be observed, are thus stated in the Royal Proclamation, dated at St. James's, February 6.

"We, taking into our most serious consideration the dangers with which this country is threatened by the progress of a grievous disease, heretofore unknown in these Islands, have resolved, and do, by and with the advice of our Privy Council, hereby command, that a public day of fasting and humiliation be observed throughout those parts of the United Kingdom, called England and Ireland on Wednesday, the 21st day of March next ensuing, that so both we and our people may humble ourselves before Almighty God, in order to obtain pardon of our sins, and in the most devout and solemn manner send up our prayers and supplications to the Divine Majesty for averting those heavy judgments which our manifold provocations have most justly deserved; and particularly beseeching God to remove from us that grievous disease with which several places in the kingdom are at this time visited. And we do strictly charge and command, that the said Public Fast be reverently and devoutly observed

by all our loving subjects in England and Ireland, as they tender the favour of Almighty God, and would avoid his wrath and indignation, and upon pain of such punishment as may be justly inflicted on all such as contemn and neglect the performance of so religious and necessary a day."

Happy would England be, if, as a nation, we duly regarded this proclamation. It is sin, and sin only, that brings down the Divine wrath either upon nations or individuals. The SINS OF THE COUNTRY are very grievous and aggravated.

Consider how mercifully God has dealt with us. He has now for many centuries favoured us with the light of Christianity; and when by our sins that light was almost lost in the darkness of Popery, He raised up our blessed and martyred Reformers, we were delivered from the errors of Rome, and the pure Word of God was freely proclaimed amongst us. He has continued this blessing, notwithstanding innumerable provocations, for above 300 years, again and again reviving his work amongst us; and perhaps no nation is more favoured than we are at the present moment with faithful preaching of the Gospel, and with the free and extended circulation of God's Holy Word in every part of our land.

These religious privileges and advantages make our sins peculiarly offensive to Almighty God. It may be well here for the writer, though he deeply feels his own share in the sins of the nation, more expressly to point out some of those sins. He does it with unfeigned grief and sorrow, and with hearty desires for the best good of every class of his fellow-countrymen.

The Sabbath day is very extensively and fearfully profaned. The Sunday press pours forth its tens of thousands of newspapers; and Sunday travelling, Sunday letter-writing, Sunday pleasures, and Sunday traffic, provoke God week by week, on that day which he has peculiarly set apart for himself.

The habit of Drinking has, it is to be feared, much increased, so that multitudes in our country injure themselves, and rob their families, and bring down His wrath

on their souls, who has declared that *drunkards shall not inherit the kingdom of heaven.*

While many of the lower classes manifest an excellent spirit of quietness and good order, yet insubordination among them has greatly increased. Hence those fires that have consumed the produce of the earth, and disturbances in leading towns in our country. The inexpressible folly of such conduct, and its great wickedness before God, must be manifest to every Christian.

While many in the higher classes do much for their poorer neighbours, yet it must be confessed that want of consideration for the poor is another sin of this day. It is a painful fact, that multitudes of the poor can hardly by their utmost efforts procure a bare subsistence for themselves and their children. Many causes may be assigned for this; but where there is sinful indulgence or criminal neglect in their superiors, it especially becomes them to humble themselves before God. James v. 1—5.

God has indeed, in his just providence to punish the sins of all classes, brought it to pass that *in the fulness of our sufficiency we are in straits.* The general thirst after gain has been so eager, and excited such unholy rivalry and competition, as to produce great suffering. Hence it has often arisen that the master has been unable to employ the servant, or the servant has found it difficult to subsist upon what the master can afford to pay. The only cure for these and our other evils, is for every one to return to the Lord, each from our own evil ways. If we *seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness,* we shall all find that other things are *added to us.*

The spirit of the Public Journals must be peculiarly offensive to Almighty God; they frequently *devise dominion, and speak evil of dignities;* they are *often boasters, proud, fierce, despisers of those that are good, heady, and high-minded.* O how sinfully are the powers of mind and imagination, property, learning, and influence perverted and employed against that God, *from whom* alone *come* these talents, and *every good and perfect gift.*

The crying sins of Slavery in the West Indies, and of

the sanction of Idolatrous Worship in the East Indies, are great national iniquities.

By pride and vain glory, by covetousness, rapacity, and luxury, by frauds in trade, by slander and quarrelling, by swearing, cursing, and perjuries, we have as a nation grievously sinned against God.

The root of these sins is our casting off the fear of God, and living as without God in the world. In some, this proceeds to open and avowed infidelity, publicly proclaimed in our streets; in others it assumes the form of liberalism, or indifference to every religious sentiment; but, in all, this state of mind must be very displeasing to Him *in whom we live, and move, and have our being.*

Our national principles, as embodied in our Confessions, and Liturgy, and Constitution, have been eminently Christian; but our conduct has not corresponded with our principles, and in our public and national proceedings we have not duly acknowledged Him who has said, *them that honour me I will honour.*

Our religious divisions are another truly affecting sin. Brethren in Christ, who ought to be as one body, are divided and separated from each other, and speak against each other.

Above all, Christ, the Saviour, the glory of our religion, the only hope of sinners, *the name to which every knee must bow,* has been greatly neglected. His grace has not been duly set forth, nor cordially and generally received, by those who profess his name, and are under the solemn bonds of baptismal vows, to yield themselves to his service.

We have each also personal sins to be confessed, and to humble ourselves for. All our transgressions of God's law, and all our abuse or neglect of his gospel, make a part of the national guilt, and add to its fearful amount.

These are some of the chief causes of those heavy judgments which hang over us, and the chief reasons therefore for a national humiliation. I would now endeavour to give you some HELP FOR ITS DUE OBSERVANCE.

Fasting is a scriptural duty, especially in the time of necessity and distress. It is plainly required in God's holy word, not only privately (Matt. vi. 16—18. Mark ii. 20.), but also as a national act. (Joel ii. 12—18.)

The chief end or design of a fast is well expressed in a collect of the Church of England, that may be profitably used by us on this occasion.

PRAYER FOR GRACE TO FAST.—O Lord, who for our sakes didst fast forty days and forty nights, give us grace to use such abstinence that, our flesh being subdued to the spirit, we may ever obey thy godly motions, in righteousness and true holiness, to thy honour and glory, who livest and reignest with the Father and the Holy Ghost, one God, world without end. Amen.

The mode of observing this fast must depend on circumstances. Where health will not suffer, and we shall not thereby be hindered in our religious duty, a total abstinence from food is proper; but all ought to abstain from mere animal gratifications, and like Daniel, *eat no pleasant bread* during the fast. The heads of Christian families may easily make arrangements for this end; explaining their intentions the evening before, having no regular meals, but such necessary food as may be requisite to prevent injury to the health.

The special duties of a fast-day are—

1. SEPARATION FROM COMPANY. Retirement and seclusion, as far as our circumstances admit, in those parts of the day not engaged in public duties, that we may have time for secret communion with God, are important means of edification; much and earnest private prayer is the root of a blessing on all other duties of this day.

2. SELF-EXAMINATION. We should look back on our past lives, retrace our whole conduct towards God and our fellow-creatures, and compare it with the rules of God's word. Our greater offences, our secret sins, our omissions, the true state of our souls, should be subjects of close and thorough scrutiny with earnest prayer, such as David offered:—*Search me, O Lord, and know my heart: try me and know my thoughts; and see if there be*

any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting. (Ps. cxxxix. 23, 24.) Our own sins, diligently and honestly searched out, will show us how large has been our personal share of national guilt, and what reason we, individually, have to be humbled before God.

3. CONFESSION OF SIN is another peculiar duty of such a day. How particular Daniel's confession of sin was when he fasted, we see fully manifested in that striking prayer recorded in his 9th chapter. It well becomes us, this day, not only to join in the public confession of the congregation, but in private, largely and fully, freely and ingenuously, to confess, with all their aggravations, the sins which a diligent self-examination has brought before us.

4. HOLY RESOLUTIONS OF AMENDMENT should be formed in the strength of Christ, and with a due regard to his glory. We should determine, by God's grace, to turn from all our evil ways, to undo all that we have sinfully done, and make restitution to all those we have injured. Zaccheus's was a noble resolution, and may be a good pattern for all those who have acquired unjust gain—*Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor, and if I have wronged any man I restore to him fourfold.* Let us, PERSONALLY, begin anew to live to God, and consecrate ourselves afresh to his service; and let FAMILY reformations also commence on this day.

5. INTERCESSION, again, is peculiarly a duty at this season, not only in public prayer, but also in private. Thus Abraham interceded for Sodom. Thus Daniel poured out his soul in fervent intercession, and while he was *speaking in prayer*, he obtained an answer to his supplications. Thus David, in the time of pestilence, interceded and prevailed in behalf of Jerusalem.

6. MERCY TO OTHERS is a peculiarly suitable accompaniment to fasting. How express is the Divine record here—*Is not this the fast that I have chosen, to loose the bands of wickedness, to undo the heavy burdens, and to let the oppressed go free, and that ye break every yoke? Is it not to deal thy bread to the hungry, and that thou bring the poor that are cast out to thy house? When thou seest*

the naked that thou cover him, and that thou hide not thyself from thine own flesh? Then shall thy light break forth as the morning, and thine health shall spring forth speedily.

To strengthen you to perform these duties, lift up your eyes to Him whom God has *exalted to be a Prince and a Saviour to give repentance and remission of sins.* (Acts v. 31.) *He has received gifts even for the rebellious,* and will abundantly give his Holy Spirit to them that ask Him. (Luke xi. 13.)

Having pointed out the duties of a fast-day, it may be well also to notice some DANGERS to which we are exposed at such a time.

1. HYPOCRISY, or outside fasting, without any inward humiliation, is very offensive to God. *Beware ye of the leaven of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy.* (Luke xii. 1.) *Behold, ye fast for strife and debate, and to smite with the fist of wickedness: ye shall not fast as ye do this day, to make your voice to be heard on high. Is it such a fast that I have chosen? a day for a man to afflict his soul? is it to bow down his head as a bulrush, and to spread sackcloth and ashes under him? wilt thou call this a fast, and an acceptable day to the Lord?* (Isaiah lviii. 4, 5.) To make a show of it for the sake of gaining a religious name among men, is totally to pervert that which was designed for humility and self-abasement.

2. SELF-RIGHTEOUSNESS, or thinking better of ourselves on account of it, and that we do something in fasting to merit God's favour, is another gross perversion of this sacred duty. The true meaning of this duty is an open confession of our sinfulness, unworthiness, and just exposure to the wrath of Almighty God, and an acknowledgment of our entire dependance on his sovereign mercy and grace for a free salvation, through faith in the atonement of our Lord Jesus Christ. (Luke xviii. 9—14.)

3. TRIFLING WITH A FAST is another danger to which, in this age, we are greatly exposed. The messengers of Hezekiah inviting the people of Israel to turn again unto the Lord their God, were by many *laughed to scorn and mocked* (2 Chron. xxx. 10.), but some *humbled*

themselves and came to Jerusalem. God grant that it may be with us as it then was *in Judah*, where *the hand of the Lord was to give them one heart to do the commandment of the king, and of the princes, by the word of the Lord.* (Ver. 12.) Oh! may every reader beware of ridiculing or slighting a service which, if so treated, is a gross insult upon God, and must bring down his serious displeasure.

4. MAKING IT A DAY OF BUSINESS is forbidden in God's word. *Behold, in the day of your fast, ye exact all your labours.* (Isaiah lviii. 3.) Masters of families, those in business who have many dependants, and those who have many labourers, are called to give these dependant on them this day for those religious duties and observances for which it is set apart.

There is another sin marked in Scripture with special reproof.

5. MAKING IT A DAY OF PLEASURE. *Behold, in the day of your fast ye find pleasure.* (Isaiah lviii. 3.) Against this sin there is an awful threatening thus stated:—*In that day did the Lord of hosts call to weeping and to mourning, and to baldness, and to girding with sackcloth: and behold joy and gladness, slaying oxen, and killing sheep, eating flesh and drinking wine: let us eat and drink; for to-morrow we die.* And what was the result of such a mockery of God? The Prophet goes on:—*And it was revealed in mine ears by the Lord of hosts, surely this iniquity shall not be purged from you till ye die, saith the Lord of hosts.* (Isaiah xxii. 12—14.)

We have many encouraging EXAMPLES of the good effects of a fast duly observed. The reader is referred to the cases of Jehoshaphat (2 Chron. xx. 3.), Esther (iv. 16.), the people of Nineveh (Jonah iii. 4.), Ezra (viii. 21—23; x. 6.), Nehemiah (i. 4.), and Daniel (ix. 10.).

Such passages of Scripture as the following are very suitable for private reading:—Psalm li.; Isaiah i. liii. lv. lviii.; Ezekiel ix. xviii.; Daniel ix.; Jonah iii. iv.; Joel ii.; Matt. ix.; Luke xv.; Romans iii.; 2 Tim. iii.; Hebrews xii.; the whole Epistles of James, Peter, John, and Jude.

In conclusion, we would earnestly entreat every reader to attend to the direction given by Isaiah:—*Wash you, make you clean, put away the evil of your doings from before mine eyes, cease to do evil, learn to do well, seek judgment, relieve the oppressed, judge the fatherless, plead for the widow.* And to assist you in fulfilling these directions, consider how rich is the following promise, embracing the fullest forgiveness of sins of every character, and of the deepest dye:—*Come now and let us reason together, saith the Lord: Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow—though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool.* Well may we entertain the liveliest hopes, when the only-begotten Son of the Most High became man, lived, shed his most precious blood, died, rose again, and now intercedes that sin may be forgiven and the sinner pardoned, justified, adopted into the Divine Family, sanctified, and for ever blessed. *God so loved the world that he gave his only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life.* (John iii. 16.)

If this public fast be indeed a *national act*, and duly observed, we may yet have the most cheering expectations of good for our country. While other nations are casting off religious ordinances, it would be a blessed token for England if we were only thereby made more zealous in the service of God. Then, indeed, we should be delivered from all our evils, and should become a nation whom God delighted to honour and to bless.

But though we cannot influence a nation, we may each for ourselves and in our own circle obey those in authority over us, confess our Saviour, and follow the directions of God's word; and we shall individually find for ourselves that promise realized, *thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly.* (Matt. vi. 18.) It is to a due observance of fasting and its accompanying duties that the gracious promise is made—*Then shall thy light rise in obscurity, and thy darkness be as the noon-day. And the Lord shall guide thee continually, and satisfy thy soul in drought, and thou shalt be like a watered garden, and like*

a spring of water whose waters fail not, and they that be of thee shall build the old waste places, thou shalt raise up the foundations of many generations, and thou shalt be called the repairer of the breach, the restorer of paths to dwelt in. (Isaiah lviii. 10—12.)

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THE END.

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